



JENNIFER HIGDON:

A CALL FOR RECOGNITION

by Hannah Heaton

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Jennifer Higdon, (b. 1962-)

A commission-based composer since 1992.



WHY JENNIFER HIGDON DESERVES MORE RECOGNITION IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

- Dr. Higdon's perseverance despite her unusual career path.
- Dr. Higdon's remarkable advocacy for American and Classical music.
- Dr. Higdon's expressive qualities she demonstrates in her compositions.



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CAREER: JOURNEY AS A COMPOSER

- Despite a late start at composition, she persevered and flourished under the instruction of her mentors and support from her colleagues.
- Received Bachelor's from Bowling Green State University, an Artist Diploma from The Curtis Institute of Music, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Composition from the University of Pennsylvania
- Was constantly told by others that she would never make it.
- Dr. Higdon deserves to be remembered as one who never gave up and proceeded to become a successful composer who won Grammy Awards and Pulitzer Prizes in 2010, 2018, and 2020.

ADVOCACY: CLASSICAL AND AMERICAN MUSIC

- Dr. Higdon's music proves to have great examples or representations of Classical forms, and it embodies the American style as well.
- Not much global awareness for American music. So, Jennifer Higdon's first opera, Cold Mountain, winning the prestigious International Opera Award for Best World Premiere in 2016 was a big deal.
- Why? Because Cold Mountain was also the first American opera to do so in the award's history, giving Jennifer Higdon the status of giving American music a name in musical history.
- As a composer with little classical music background, Dr. Higdon's musical style embodies a mixture of modern music and classical tonality and forms. This gives the unique and well-loved musical language that she has today.

EXPRESSION: MUSICAL LANGUAGE

- Dr. Higdon does a wonderful job at surprising the listener with different approaches in her melodies. Her mixture of Classical forms and modern tendencies give her a refreshing sound in her musical language.
- Speaking to your audience through your music is a very crucial duty as a composer according to Jennifer Higdon. She says to think of composing as “communicating” with your audience.
- “Even if this is someone’s first classical concert, the music should speak to you. You don’t need a P.H.D. to understand it.”



WHY REMEMBER JENNIFER HIGDON?



Was determined to compose as a career despite uncertain beginnings.

Was not afraid to be an advocate for American and Classical music in modern times.

Consistently conveys her own unique expressive qualities in her works.



Legacy

Flute solo with piano.

Performed by Emma
Resmini (flute) and
Hugh Sung (piano)

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=s6mtL-smU_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6mtL-smU_U)

1:35



Blue Cathedral

Orchestral piece written in
memory of Jennifer
Higdon's brother.

Performed by Bowling
Green Philharmonia

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=-8E06h8pZiY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8E06h8pZiY)


3:25

INTERVIEW: Q&A WITH JENNIFER HIDDEN

I would love to know what pushed you to composition, even though you had no experience prior to college. Music composition is said to be extremely competitive and I am curious what experience or thought went through your mind before you began composition as a potential career.

“I was in college and majoring in flute performance when I first tried to write music. My flute teacher, Judith Bentley, had me write a little piece for a flute master class that was to be given by Harvey Sollberger. I was fascinated with the process of creating music and have been hooked ever since.

I have never thought about music in competitive terms. I didn’t start playing an instrument until I was 15 and I didn’t start composing until I was 20 so I spent my entire college education, through a Ph.D., trying to catch up to my peers. I loved everything about music and wanted to compose more than anything. Although others (teachers, colleagues, etc.) tried to tell me that I would never catch up and make it as a composer, I was determined, focused and persistent.”



INTERVIEW:

Q&A WITH JENNIFER HIDDEN


What the hardest part was about pursuing a career in which you were considered “a beginner” for lack of a better term, and what personally allowed you to persevere through your journey down that path?

“The hardest part was probably trying to catch up to my peers. Part of the reason I persevered was because my father was a free lance illustrator so I knew what that kind of life looked like.”

INTERVIEW: Q&A WITH JENNIFER HIDDEN

Do you have a composition that you personally feel is attached to your own first taste of success?

“I don’t think about my compositions and success in that way so I really can’t pick one. Even though I had been writing steadily for 10 years, it wasn’t until my Concerto for Orchestra was performed in front of thousands of orchestra managers in 2002 that my music became known in the orchestra world. *blue cathedral*, written in memory of my brother, is the work that holds the most emotional meaning for me and has been performed almost 700 times around the world. The Percussion Concerto was my first Grammy win so that is special. That same year, however, the Violin Concerto won the Pulitzer Prize and that’s probably the biggest honor in classical music. With all that, however, there’s still nothing more satisfying than watching an audience enjoying a work of mine.”



INTERVIEW: Q&A WITH JENNIFER HIDDEN

What is your driving force that keeps you going when you feel musically blocked creatively?

“I’ve been lucky thus far and haven’t really experienced writer’s block. I believe it’s because I write almost every day. I exercise that part of my brain on a consistent basis, just like any other muscle in my body. I may not like what I’ve written and end up deleting it all, but I find that I’ve at least written something by the end of the day. Picasso once said that “inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.” I believe that’s very true! “

INTERVIEW: Q&A WITH JENNIFER HIDDEN

Can you give any advice to an aspiring composer?

“Composing is much like being a performer—it requires hours of practice every day and years of study to become good at it. Even if you’re a great composer, it may take more years to be recognized or have your work performed. Therefore, composing has to be a passion and something that you really can’t live without doing because it can be a long road. I’ve had famous soloists/performers tell me that they’ve decided to start composing, and I’m surprised because these performers would never expect me to just pick up a violin or the piano and start playing at their skill level. Composition is so much more than just putting notes together.”

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